

ORIENTING TO THE EMERGING NEW STORY

By Simon Spire

For years, the phrase “the new story” has served as a beacon for my work and my own journey. I first encountered its prominent use in the visionary writings of Charles Eisenstein in 2012 as I was in the midst of transitioning from a formative nine-year creative and contemplative path into new adventures that were beckoning. Charles’s philosophical text, *The Ascent of Humanity*, impressed me with its comprehensive excavation of “the story of separation” and the glimpses it offered into “the story of interbeing.” My lifelong interest in the potential for creating more life-supporting economic and cultural dynamics found deep nourishment in his work and that of others to which it led. One place this enchantment with the new story eventually took me was to the Eco-Institute at Pickards Mountain in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. My wife and I had met the founders of the Eco-Institute at a retreat hosted by Charles in New York, where we lived at the time. So taken were we with the vision of providing transformative, immersive experiences for the next generation of change-makers while cultivating community and tending to the human-Earth relationship, that we ultimately took the leap of leaving the big city for the endless, wooded hills of the North Carolina Piedmont.

I had little understanding at the time of Thomas Berry’s profound influence on the streams of thought I was engaging, an influence that I would later discover was at times related directly to these streams of thought and at others contributed in more subtle ways to the larger field of those who sense the possibility of a profound shift in humanity’s story. He is, of course, known for celebrating the emergence of “the new story.” The two most fundamental threads in my own work—exploring the nature of full human development and flourishing in the sense of psychological and spiritual growth, and exploring new dynamics in economic and cultural organizations—feature prominently in Berry’s work. Teachers I had the good fortune of engaging with, such as Bill Plotkin, had been touched deeply by Berry’s wisdom. And I was eventually to discover that the area to which I had re-located—including the Eco-Institute, where I began facilitating programs focused on inner development and self-inquiry—was one of the epicenters of Berry’s influence.

Almost seven years later, I feel privileged to have been drawn into the orbit of Thomas Berry’s Great Work. Discovering a community that,

in my experience, is organized around both a rich stream of intellectual inquiry into history, culture, society, and ecology and a profound appreciation for the sense of the sacred and of the mystery of life has been a wonderful support for my own vision and pursuits. As my involvement with the Center for Ecozoic Studies has grown, I have felt nourished by its offerings and was fortunate enough to begin months of study and mentorship with Herman Greene as we examined the texts contained in CES's journal publication *The Ecozoic Way*. The culmination of this expanding appreciation for Berry's work came in the 2019 Living Legacy of Thomas Berry, a three-day event held in Chapel Hill and Whitsett, North Carolina, during which I witnessed the vibrancy of the soulful and intellectual community fostered by Berry's vision.

It may come as no surprise to learn that I was one of the younger attendees at this event. It would be accurate to say that I am more distant from Berry's work than many others sharing their stories in this volume, which is true in terms of the direct impact he has had on my life, my geographical origins in New Zealand, and my generational placement. What I find I am appreciating in contributing to this volume, however, is that—whether we know it or not—all of us who feel called to contribute to the Great Work in its many guises and names are in it together. Regardless of our generation or location, we are all being drawn, in various ways, by the same possibilities of emergence that Berry so evocatively articulated. Moreover, we are standing on the shoulders of giants. Thomas Berry is one of those giants.

A core element of my work revolves around supporting people in discovering the depths of their being and their authentic, evolving path of serving what wants to be born in our world. My longstanding interest in the evolution of our systems and culture also continues to be a central orienting inquiry in my work. As a soul-centric contemplative teacher and guide, songwriter, and researcher, in my current academic and writing pursuits, and with organizations such as the Post-Growth Institute, I am buoyed by all those who have given their lives to the adventure of contributing to the Great Work. Thomas Berry's far-seeing vision and his synthesis of human history, Earth history, our current predicament, and the sacred mysteries of life continue to enrich my journey and my work.